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Raja Ram Mohun Roy

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N. MACNICOL, M.A.

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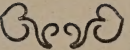

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RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY.

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RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY

I—INTRODUCTORY

RAM MOHAN ROY is a remarkable figure and occupies a remarkable position among the great men of India. He attracts our attention and our interest not only by reason of his striking personality, but also because of the particular juncture at which he made his appearance. He seems to step forth from among the mists of a legendary past into the sudden light of a new day. As is the custom in his land, "with one stride comes the dawn," and on its threshold appears this stately figure. There has never been in India any lack of saints and heroes, but they loom for the most part as vague and sometimes monstrous forms from among the doubtful shadows of the past. He first stands out, a clearly discernible, but not the less on that account a heroic figure, bringing in a new epoch in the development of his country's thought. He is, as an Indian newspaper recently described him, "the father of modern India, its ideals and aspirations." There can be little doubt that as events unfold themselves in this land and as the direction of its spiritual development is discerned, it will be increasingly apparent that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the herald of a new age for his people, that he kindled a fire in India that shall never be quenched. It is the lot of the pioneer in any region of thought, just because he is a pioneer and therefore moved by thoughts as yet beyond the reach of the body of the people, to be misunderstood. Few are ready to welcome the travail that

accompanies the birth of new ideas, the painful disruption from an old and well accustomed order. The religious reformer, especially, as the thoughts with which he deals have their roots deepest in the spirit, is assured of implacable hostility from many of those whose easy comfort he disturbs. From this rule Ram Mohan Roy was not exempt. He had his full share of obloquy during his lifetime, and only gradually since then his commanding position among his countrymen is being recognized. More and more, as the slow course of India's spiritual evolution unfolds itself, it will be realized how deep and how permanent the influence is destined to be of the movement to which he gave the first impulse.

But at the same time, while his work was epoch-making, and his appearance marks the opening of a new chapter in Indian thought, that does not mean that the movement that he inaugurated had no roots in his country's past or that he had no predecessors. New views, unless they are in organic relation to those that they displace, are artificial and therefore impermanent products. The new religious epoch which Ram Mohan Roy initiated does not differ in kind from those great religious quickenings that are seen from time to time through the dim centuries stirring the heart of India. There have always been "Indian Protestants," as the late Mr. Justice Ranade has called them, who, when religion has fallen to the level of a philosophy or a ceremonial, prompted by the unquenchable instincts of the heart, have opened anew the path that leads to God. As in the case of Luther, so in the case of Ram Mohan Roy, there were reformers before the Reformation. In no age has India been without its prophets, and of that old stock he came.

Both those aspects of Ram Mohan Roy's work must be kept in view if justice is to be done to it. He is an innovator

but not therefore disloyal to his country's ancient ideals. He is much more than an iconoclast. He cannot be understood if he is viewed merely as one who "cut the painter" that bound him to his people's past. His task, as in the case of every Reformer whose work is of abiding value, was rather to fulfil than to destroy. The value of a study of his life largely lies in this, that by his example his countrymen may learn the difficult lesson, that more than any other is set to India to-day,—how fully to inherit the new truth that has come to them without at the same time proving unfaithful to the ideals of their fathers. A century ago Ram Mohan Roy recognized the problem to be solved, and in facing it displayed a courage and a balance of judgment that make the study of his life of permanent value to his countrymen.

II—HIS EARLY LIFE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

This pioneer of modern Indian religious and social reform was born at Rādhānagar in Bengal in 1774. He belonged to a very respectable Brahman family, which had resided continuously at Murshedabad until the time of his father, Ram Kant Roy, who removed before the birth of his distinguished son to the district of Burdwan, where he had a Zemindari. While Ram Mohan's father's ancestors held various official positions under the Nawabs of Murshedabad, his mother, herself a woman of great devoutness, belonged to a sacerdotal family, which, as her son says, "uniformly adhered to a life of religious observances and devotion."

The place and the time of his birth were alike propitious to the formation of the man that Ram Mohan Roy became. Bengal formed the gateway through which at that time a new

civilization from the west was sweeping in upon India. The year of his birth was the year in which the first Governor-General of India was appointed and a new political predominance established. India has not yet altogether made up her mind whether to bless or to curse that day that saw England plant her feet firmly on her shores and seat herself on the throne of the Grand Moghul. Indians have not yet made up their minds whether or not to rejoice in the loss that, temporarily at least, they sustained, when England took the sceptre into her own strong hands, but they surely need not hesitate to recognize and rejoice in the more than compensating gain. For there can be no question that by contact with the new ideas that since then have continued to flow in upon the land India has had her intellectual re-awakening. More and more as time passes and the history of India can be realized in its true perspective, it will be realized that the touch of this young civilization of the West aroused and quickened to new power and new results, spiritual and intellectual forces that, once so mighty, had for long seemed altogether spent. Whether England's political predominance proves in the end a blessing or a curse, whether it will endure and attain peacefully its goal in teaching this people how, worthily and wisely, to rule their own great land, or whether it falls into speedy ruin and is forgotten, yet of a surety it will be recognized more and more by Indians, with the passage of the years, that the contact with western thought has brought about the re-birth of India and that one born, as Ram Mohan Roy was, in the closing years of the eighteenth century, was born indeed "under the opening eyelids of the morn."

He was no less fortunate in his birthplace. As Nanak, in the very path of the Muhammadan invaders as they swept down upon Hindostan through the North-Western passes, learning of them such wisdom as was theirs to bring, had his religious instincts quickened and his mental horizon widened,

so Ram Mohan Roy, growing up in like manner in the very channel by which the new ideas were flowing in upon the land, could not but be moved by them. There are many obstacles in India, from the nature of its peoples and the influences that surround them, that hinder the quick acceptance of new views of things, but these are least powerful in Bengal. That province has been and is still a vortex of religious and intellectual experiments, and its "vanward and eager" people have never been slow to make trial of any new aspect of thought that may be presented to them.

The circumstances of Ram Mohan Roy's training still further helped towards breadth of view. He belonged to a Vaishnavite Brahman family and was thus born into the same spiritual inheritance as all the greatest religious teachers that had preceded him from Rāmānuja to Chaitanya. However much it was corrupted and degraded—and the testimony of Ram Mohan Roy's Bengali biographer, Babu Jogendra Chunder Ghose, is that at that time its "immorality and corruptions were simply revolting"*—yet Vaishnavism at its best had in it elements of real spiritual power and seems to have deserved Monier-Williams's description of it as "the only real religion of the Indian people." It was fitting that one who sought afterwards so earnestly to promote a pure theism in India should have been in his early years a member of one of those Vaishnava sects of which the late Mr. Justice Ranade has said that they "attained to a higher and purer conception of Theism than any of the other prevailing systems."†

Amid such influences Ram Mohan Roy was born and grew up. At the age of ten he was sent to Patna to study Persian and Arabic. There, in his Persian studies, he was attracted most, we are told, by the mystic teaching of the Sufis, by

* "The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy," Vol. I, p. 6.

† "Essays on Religious and Social Reform," p. 12.

whom the high and somewhat remote monotheism of Islām has been humanized and rendered more spiritual and attractive. We may surmise that there also in the birthplace of Guru Govind, where a temple in his honour stands, he may have learned of that remarkable theistic movement which sprang from the contact of Hinduism and Muhammadanism and had Kabir and Nanak for its prophets. It was, as he tells us himself, the ambition of his father that sent him so far afield that he might study the languages necessary for preferment in a Muhammadan court. The religious tradition of his mother's family required him also to be familiar with Sanskrit, and for that reason he proceeded from Patna to the capital of Hindu orthodoxy and Hindu learning. How far he was influenced while at Benares by revolt from his surroundings in that city of superstition, how far by his previous studies of purer faiths, and how far he was moved simply by his own earnest and enlightened spirit, we cannot tell, but we know that he returned presently to his father's house at the age of sixteen a convinced and determined enemy of idolatry.

At a time when a patriotism has arisen in India so bigoted as to view with jealous and unfriendly eyes whatever comes to the land from beyond its borders, it may be well to emphasize the fact that as yet Ram Mohan Roy had come under none but Oriental influences. He knew no English. Up to this time and during the "wander years" that followed we can imagine the eager lad welcoming every spiritual influence with which a sincere and ardent nature found itself in accord, —Hindu, it might be, or Muhammadan or Buddhist. Whatever truth he recognized in the teaching of Sikh or Sufi found an entrance to his hospitable heart. Political matters had not as yet begun seriously to occupy his thoughts: the enlargement of his views in that respect came later. He tells us indeed that at that time he had a feeling of great aversion

to the establishment of the British power in India. It is true, as we shall see, that, as he grew more and more with the years a lover of his country in the highest and worthiest sense, his attitude in this matter underwent a change. But not even the narrowest patriot can refuse that name to him when he became an outcast from his father's house for his religious convictions. For when at the age of only sixteen years he declared himself a reformer and set himself against many of the traditions of his home, he was what his own country and his own country's teachers and what the illumination of a sincere spirit made him. This first and decisive step in his career was certainly taken under no foreign influence.

III—THE BEGINNING OF HIS WORK AS A REFORMER

Young as Ram Mohan was, it was already a characteristic of his resolute nature that he found it impossible to remain silent and acquiescent in the presence of what his reason and his conscience condemned. It was not long before he found himself in conflict with the members of his own household. Not content with passive opposition to what he believed to be a corruption and degradation of religion, this precocious iconoclast is said to have boldly attacked idolatry in a treatise which caused his father, like another Dasarat, as he himself said, to drive forth his Ram into the wilderness. No more than a boy, as he was, he was yet ready to suffer for his convictions, and the next four years of his life were spent by him wandering from province to province and even beyond the frontiers of Tibet, a lonely lad sustained only by the steadfastness of his faith. "We might well compare notes," says

Mr. Justice Ranade, commenting on this episode in Ram Mohan Roy's career, "as to what *we* did at sixteen with such a record. Were any of us lighted up with the fire that burned in his heart?" *

It was after his reconciliation with his father and his return from those wanderings that Ram Mohan Roy, now twenty-two years of age, began to study English and, with increasing knowledge, to revise his estimate of the influence of England in India. He was never afraid, as we shall see, to criticise what he believed to be errors in the Government of his country by the English, but he tells us how he became "persuaded that their rule, though a foreign yoke, would lead more speedily and surely to the amelioration of the native inhabitants." † He continued to take, as he says, "the path which conscience and sincerity directed" with characteristic courage and independence, unaffected either by the flattery of friends or the frowns of those whom he displeased. His boldness in withstanding superstition and such evil practices as "*sati*" once more brought him into conflict with his father. After his father's death in 1804 or 1805 he prosecuted his campaign with still greater boldness, calling in the aid of the printing-press and publishing pamphlets in Persian and Arabic as well as in Bengali. "This raised," he says, "such a feeling against me that I was at last deserted by every person except two or three Scotch friends, to whom," he goes on in words that a Scotsman is proud to record, "and to the nation to which they belong I always feel grateful." Even his mother, who belonged to a powerful priestly family of the Sakta sect, was throughout most fanatical in her opposition to her son.

In such circumstances it must have required all those qualities, which Max Müller attributes to him, of "unsel-

* "Essays on Religious and Social Reform," p. 124.

† "Last Days of Ram Mohan Roy," p. 19.

fishness, honesty and boldness," to enable Ram Mohan Roy to persist in his course. It is difficult to understand how Dwarakanath Tagore could have charged him to Max Müller with being a "trimmer." * One sees no sign of it in the single-minded courage of his career. True, he prospered, and that has been brought as a charge against him. But there seems no reason to believe that the moderate wealth which he possessed was anything more than what had come to him by inheritance and what his own industry and ability had earned. From 1800 to 1813 he discharged the important duties of *diwan* or head officer under the Collector and Judge in several districts of Bengal. In 1814 he came to Calcutta and, retiring from Government service, "gave up," to use his own words, "all worldly avocations and engaged in religious culture and the investigation of truth." From this time forward he devoted himself entirely to his task as a Reformer, and the house which he built for himself in the Circular Road became a centre to which were attracted all those who were of a like mind with him. He was ever a fighter and there were abuses enough about him to keep his sword from rusting in its scabbard. Social reform, politics, and always and especially religion found in him an untiring champion. Especially religion, for he perceived that without a spiritual faith, as their source and spring, no efforts for social or political reform would have any permanent effect in bettering the condition of the people. Accordingly, we find that as early as 1815 a little company of thoughtful Hindus were in the habit of gathering at his house to unite in some form of monotheistic worship.

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* "Life of Max Müller," by his wife.

IV—HIS WORK AS A RELIGIOUS REFORMER

From the year 1814, when he settled in Calcutta, until his death, the record of the life of Ram Mohan Roy is a record of his labours in the cause of reform, religious, social and educational. His whole strength was given to those objects and for each he laboured with characteristic ardour and unselfishness. But it is especially to Ram Mohan Roy as a religious teacher that we must look if we wish to see him at the work which lay nearest to his heart and stirred him most deeply. Immediately after his father's death he published in Persian a work, "Against the idolatry of all religions," and from that time forward throughout his strenuous life he was unwearied in his labours in vindication of the unity and spirituality of God. Whatever views seemed to him to conflict with such a conception, whether they were maintained by Hindu idolater or Christian missionary, found in him a relentless antagonist. That he was always right no one will maintain. But however one may disagree with some of his arguments and believe, for example, that he misunderstood many of the Christian doctrines that he controverted, yet no one can refuse a tribute of admiration to a controversialist so earnest, so courteous, and by whom the religion that he refused fully to accept had been studied in so serious and devout a spirit.

Sir Monier Williams says of him that he was "perhaps the first earnest-minded investigator of the science of comparative religion that the world has produced." That is, no doubt, a statement that requires qualification, but it may undoubtedly be claimed for Ram Mohan Roy that in the comparative study of Indian faiths he was a pioneer, who by his openness of mind and freedom from prejudice set an example that may well be commended to those who have followed in his footsteps since. There is nothing remarkable

in the fact that he, living at the time when he lived, should be a syncretist. As at the period of the disintegration of the Old Roman religions, so amid the similar conditions in India to-day, attempts to rescue elements in the decaying faiths and re-combine them are inevitable. But what is remarkable in the case of Ram Mohan Roy is the earnest labour that he spent on the task of testing the rival claimants to his allegiance and the seriousness with which he sought the truth. We have seen already how in his early years he came under the influence of one after another of various religious movements that have prevailed in India. He was no dilletante student of the truths that they taught. He read the Koran in Arabic and the Buddhist sacred books in Pali. But later another and more potent influence laid its grasp upon him. In 1820 he published in English, Bengali and Sanskrit a book to which he gave the title, "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness." The reason for his doing so he has himself stated in his introduction. "This simple code of religion and morality," he says, "is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God . . . . and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in their various duties to God, to themselves and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in its present form." Every Christian must surely deeply regret the attitude of antagonism adopted by certain missionaries at that time in Bengal towards the compiler of this remarkable little volume. In the controversy that ensued this man, whom they stigmatized as "heathen," certainly displayed a broader and more generous Christian spirit than those who denounced him. And indeed, in spite of the unfortunate disputes in regard to Christian doctrine and their relation to the life of faith in which at this time and on other occasions he was involved, there can be no doubt that the Christian religion and

especially the teaching and example of its Founder remained to the last the dominating influence in his life.

In publishing the "Precepts of Jesus" Ram Mohan Roy had in view, as he affirmed, the object of procuring respect for the moral teaching of Christ, as distinguished from the doctrines of the Christian Church, to many of which he was strongly opposed. Accordingly he collected in this volume, as he himself says, "such sayings of Christ, as he thought intelligible to all, conveying conviction with them and best calculated to lead mankind to universal love and harmony; not dwelling upon these matters, an observance of which is not absolutely ordained and the interpretations of which, instead of introducing peace and happiness, have generally given rise to disputes and controversies." This book was published in 1820, and for three successive years he was engaged in controversy with Dr. Marshman of Serampore in regard to certain Christian doctrines and the interpretation of passages in the scriptures upon which they are based. However mistaken he may have been in the meaning he attached to those passages and the conclusions he drew from them as to the teaching and the work of Christ, one can only respect his seriousness of spirit in that he took the trouble to acquire some knowledge, inadequate though it may have been, of Hebrew and of Greek that he might understand the Christian Scriptures for himself without the aid of an interpreter. The pursuit of religious truth was always recognized by Ram Mohan Roy as deserving and demanding the exercise of the highest powers with which a man is endowed. He entered upon it not as seeking what was an intellectual luxury, but what was to him a necessity of life. "To give comfort to the hearts of men was," he claimed, "the only divine doctrine," and he sought for this comfort as for hid treasure. One of his biographers gives us a picture of him, worn out with toil, in controversy with a Buddhist,

who denied the existence of a God. "The Raja," we are told, "had spent the whole day in the controversy, without stopping for food, rest or refreshment, rejoicing more in confuting one atheist than in triumphing over a hundred idolaters." That is the spirit of the true prophet, of one who is a religious reformer, not because he may, but because he must.

It was inevitable in the case of such a man that he should prove a centre of attraction to others of a like spirit. It was of the nature of things that Ram Mohan Roy should found a church. We have seen that almost from the time when he settled in Calcutta those who desired a purer worship than that of popular Hinduism began to gather at his house. This company of worshippers who at first called themselves the Ātmīya Sabhā, grew, under his guidance, in purpose and resolution until in 1828 they found courage to take the important step of forming themselves into a Theistic Church, under the designation of the Brahmo Samāj. Under this new name they met for two years in a hired house in the Chitpore Road, but presently they were able to take possession of a building erected by their own exertions and set apart for this new worship. No doubt when those Bengali Theists laid the foundations of this new Church and, under the guidance of Ram Mohan Roy's broad and catholic spirit, defined its aims, they were building better than they knew, or perhaps better even than we to-day can as yet realize. They were claiming an inheritance in India far wider than can even now be estimated. And whatever that is destined to prove, it may be claimed for Ram Mohan Roy more than for any other man as a growth from the seed of his sowing, an enduring witness to his creative personality and spiritual genius. The Trust-deed of the original Samāj, which we may take for granted to have been drawn up by him, is a testimony to his large-hearted and devout spirit. Its doors are declared to be open to "all sorts and conditions of people without

distinction as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner;" and the lofty purpose for which it was established is "the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe." There is an elevation of spirit and a breadth of charity in those words that truly represent that in Ram Mohan Roy which gives him among other and no less distinguished reformers in India an aloofness and distinction of his own. He did not possess indeed the extraordinary emotional force and fervour of Keshub Chander Sen, but there was in him a calm strength and a high seriousness that one sometimes misses in his more ardent successor. He was, it is true, a man of war from his youth, and yet he was never so, one would judge, from any mere lust for battle. He was a fighter because the constraint of duty, as it seemed to him, lay hard upon him. There was in him a resolute candour that would set no custom or convention, however accredited, higher than what he recognized to be the truth. He never appears to us as a partisan, never perplexed by personal ambition or selfish aims. He looks forth upon us from the opening years of that century "with habitually grave countenance," serene and alone, like some legendary hero, scattering the night of superstition by "lucid shafts of day."

V—HIS WORK AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

But while Ram Mohan Roy was pre-eminently a religious teacher and reformer, so that, as Max Müller has said, "in India his name has been enrolled in the book of the prophets," his labours for the social improvement of his fellow-countrymen were no less strenuous and no less fruitful.

Especially with the abolition of *sati*, the purging from his country of that supreme shame, his name is linked for all time in the history of India. "If the credit of putting an end to these horrors belongs to any man," says the late Mr. Justice Ranade, "that credit must be given to Raja Ram Mohan Roy."

It is difficult to realize how completely this awful custom held India in its grasp less than a hundred years ago. It was maintained by Ram Mohan Roy that the "practice of Con-cremation and Post-cremation of widows" was directly opposed to the directions of the most ancient Shastras. There appears indeed to be no allusion to it in the Rig Veda, and two verses that occur in the Atharva Veda Samhita and in the Rig Veda Samhita seem to indicate that the custom belonged to an earlier and more cruel age but that the kindlier spirit of the Vedic worship had prescribed a humaner course. The widow lies down by the side of her dead husband on the funeral pyre, and then is raised up again by a relative or friend with the command, "Arise, O woman, for the world of the living." The older books on religious law, such as the Code of Manu, as Ram Mohan Roy maintained, show no trace of the hideous custom. But whether it still prevailed among the Aryans in spite of the discouragement of the most authoritative teachers of the religion, or whether it was adopted from the gloomy worship of the aborigines, at all events "with the deterioration of the Aryan moral feeling" * the evil practice spread, until in Ram Mohan Roy's day it had become so prevalent among the people as to bring upon the Hindus, as he says, "the contempt and pity of all civilized nations."

The question of the attitude that the British Government should adopt towards a practice of a character so monstrous

* Dr. S. R. Bhandarkar on "Social History of India."

had perplexed successive Governors-General. The Marquess of Hastings was not alone, we may believe, in being, as he says, "acutely sensible to such an outrage against humanity." For during his period of administration, as he himself points out, eight hundred widows sacrificed themselves in a single year in the Presidency of Bengal alone. In Calcutta, in the very shadow of British law-courts, widows were burned alive every year by the hundred. It even appeared as if the Government were a party to the hideous ceremony, for Lord Minto in 1813 had issued instructions requiring the consent of a magistrate to be obtained before the rite could be performed. Such partial measures seemed only to aggravate the evil, so that the average number of *satis* for ten years prior to the arrival of Lord William Bentinck in 1828 did not fall below six hundred. Nor were most of those victims women already tottering on the verge of the grave, for whom life had lost all sweetness. Of those who were sacrificed in Bengal in 1823 two hundred and eight were between twenty and forty years of age and thirty-two were actually young girls under twenty. And though they went with vermilion on their foreheads, as brides adorned for their husbands, it is not by any means to be supposed that in any but a few rare instances they passed with joy to the flames, counting the world well lost and all its pleasures, as they followed in the footsteps of their lords. On the contrary, we are told that it was almost always necessary to bind the unwilling victim to the pyre, to heap the wood upon her so that all her struggles were in vain, to press her down with bamboos and to drown her shrieks of agony with the din of tom-toms.*

By witnessing such sights from their youth "habits of insensibility," as Ram Mohan Roy observes, had been pro-

* Ram Mohan Roy's "Conference on the Practice of Burning Widows Alive;" and "Address to Lord William Bentinck" (on the same subject).

duced in even the naturally humane Hindu to such an extent that, had it not been that there was at that time in Ram Mohan Roy one resolute to express the better spirit of his countrymen and in Lord William Bentinck a ruler not less resolute to take action in accordance with it, this practice, revolting as it was, might have remained for many a day still further to brutalize the people and to bring dishonour on the land. Ram Mohan Roy felt his heart stirred within him with an intolerable pity and pain as he saw such horrors perpetrated about him every day. He was unwearied in his labours to bring about the abolition of the inhuman rite. It required eleven years of persistent activity in this cause ere his efforts were successful. In 1818 he published his first tract against *sati* and only in 1829 was the course taken that was demanded by the "paramount dictates of justice and humanity"* and the practice declared illegal. Not even then could he rest from his labours and sheathe his sword. For, as we shall see, it was his yet unspent zeal in this sacred task and the fear lest his efforts would be even at the eleventh hour undone that were chief motives impelling him in 1830 to set forth to England on a voyage from which he was never to return.

While this reform in the customs of his people most fully occupied his attention as that most urgently demanding remedy, it only represents one of many directions in which, he was aware, the oppressed and neglected Hindu woman was in need of a champion. It is fully recognized to-day in India that in the forefront of the Social Reformer's programme must be placed the redress of woman's wrongs. Ram Mohan Roy was the first to recognize this and to set to the true direction the compass of Reform. He knew that so long as Hindu Society was based upon the degradation of its women

* The Regulation for the Abolition of *Sati*.

it was incapable of amendment. He saw how they were kept in ignorance, how Kulinism, the sale of daughters, and daily oppression and contempt were the very cause, which made it appear that the women of India were, as their oppressors alleged, "by nature of inferior understanding, without resolution, unworthy of trust, subject to passions and void of virtuous knowledge." *

There was no abuse prevalent in Bengal that did not find in Ram Mohan Roy a relentless enemy, no good cause but could count on him as a friend. Nor was his horizon limited by the boundaries of his own province or his own land. Jeremy Bentham addresses him in a letter as his "intensely admired and dearly beloved collaborator in the service of mankind." The struggles of oppressed peoples in Europe, Greece, Spain, Naples, were watched by him from far off with intensest sympathy. But his love of liberty and his desire to bid forward on the path of freedom every fallen nation was the wise passion of one who knew that the worst of slaveries is the slavery of ignorance and evil habit and that he who would be free must first prove himself worthy of his freedom. He knew that the only way of emancipation for his people was the way of illumination, and therefore he strove tirelessly against whatever might shut out from them the light. His appeals on behalf of the freedom of the Press to the supreme court in Calcutta and to the King in council breathe the noblest spirit of patriotism. His petition to the King closes with those earnest and eloquent words:—"Your Majesty's faithful subjects, from the distance of almost half the globe, appeal to Your Majesty's heart by the sympathy which forms a paternal tie between you and the lowest of your subjects, not to overlook their condition; they appeal to you by the honour of that great nation which under your royal auspices

* "Second Conference on the Practice of Burning Widows alive."

has obtained the glorious title of Liberator of Europe, not to permit the possibility of millions of your subjects being wantonly trampled on and oppressed; they lastly appeal to you by the glory of your crown, on which the eyes of the world are fixed, not to consign the natives of India to perpetual oppression and degradation."

VI—HIS WORK AS AN EDUCATIONAL REFORMER

In his attitude towards education Ram Mohan Roy was equally earnest and equally enlightened. In this connection, as in the case of the practice of *sati*, by casting the weight of his influence on the side of English, as opposed to Oriental, education, he helped to guide the Government towards a policy momentous in its effects upon his country's future. It is generally Lord Macaulay to whom is given all the credit or discredit of having committed India to the type of education that has since prevailed throughout the country. But it is a mistake to suppose that this decision was the mere consequence of the Legal Member's brilliant and self-confident shallowness. The question of the type of education that should receive the imprimatur of Government had long been a matter of controversy. The beginning of English education in Calcutta is associated with the names of David Hare, a Scotch watch-maker of that city, and of Ram Mohan Roy. For twenty years before Macaulay wrote his famous minute and Lord William Bentinck decreed that English education alone should have Government assistance, Ram Mohan Roy had been labouring to promote the study of the arts and the science of the West.

No one can charge him, at all events, with ignorance of the literature of his own land or indifference to its claims. His intention in furthering the scheme for a Hindu College in Calcutta seems to have been that in it the doctrines of the Vedanta should be taught. He established the Veda Mandir for the study of what he believed to be the pure monotheism of ancient India. By his translations of several of the Upanishads he led the way in the application of modern methods of scholarship to the elucidation of the Indian sacred books. There was surely no Indian at that time in Bengal with as intimate and as wide an acquaintance with Oriental literature and Oriental thought as Ram Mohan Roy. Macaulay, as we know, had no first-hand acquaintance with the books which he treated with such a lofty and complete contempt. Whatever may be thought of the conclusions which he set forth in his famous Education Minute of February, 1835, nothing can atone for the extraordinary sentence in which he declares "a single shelf of a good European library" to be "worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Ram Mohan Roy was of a very different opinion, and yet his advocacy of English education was not less convinced and not less vehement. He had no doubt of the need of "planting in Asia the arts and sciences of modern Europe." When in 1823 the policy of the Orientalists seemed likely to prevail and it was resolved to found a Sanskrit College in Calcutta, he addressed a strong remonstrance to the Governor-General, Lord Amherst, in which he maintained that such a College under Hindu pandits "can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessors or to society." He goes on to declare that "the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep the country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislature."

He displayed the same enlightened spirit in the warm support which he gave to the Scotch Missionary, Alexander Duff, in his plans to establish a College which would be at once English and Christian. It was probably his pain and disappointment at the scepticism that prevailed among the students of the Hindu College, which he had himself helped to establish, that attracted him towards the young missionary's scheme to provide a religious education. Two difficulties faced Mr. Duff, and both of those Ram Mohan Roy helped him to surmount. The first was the impossibility, in the face of popular prejudice, of obtaining a hall in which to commence operations. It so happened that Ram Mohan Roy and his friends were about to vacate for new premises the rented hall in the Chitpore Road in which they had been accustomed to meet for worship. He at once secured the hall for the use of the Christian Missionary. But even when a building was secured, there was the further difficulty of finding an audience. It was Ram Mohan Roy who persuaded his own personal friends to send their sons as pupils to the new College, so that Mr. Duff was able to open it with a modest company of five. Not only so but on the day fixed for the opening of the school Mr. Duff's large-hearted ally was present in person to join with the missionary and his pupils in the Lord's Prayer and to do what he could to "remove difficulties and especially to remove the prejudice against reading the Bible." *

His desire was always to promote those means by which his fellow-countrymen would be helped onwards towards better living and worthier ideals. In his evidence given in 1831 before a Committee of the House of Commons on the condition of India we find him in conclusion giving this wise counsel:—"I have no hesitation in saying, with reference to

* "The Life of Alexander Duff, D.D., LL.D.," by George Smith, LL.D., C.I.E., Vol. I, p. 21.

the general feeling of the more intelligent part of the native community, that the only course of policy that can ensure their attachment to any form of Government would be that of making them eligible to gradual promotion, according to their respective abilities and merits to situations of trust and responsibility in the state." Whatever the subject he deals with one finds in him the same clearness of vision, the same broad-minded wisdom. Governors and governed alike could have sought the advice of no saner, no more sympathetic guide. Of a truth Ram Mohan Roy did more than any man to set the feet of modern India on the true path of progress and to set its face towards the light.

VII—HIS LAST YEARS

We have now come to the closing chapter in Ram Mohan Roy's career,—his visit to England and his death there. He had long felt, he tells us, a strong desire to visit Europe and "obtain by personal observation a more thorough insight into its manners, customs, religion and political institutions."* Many years passed before it was possible for him to fulfil this desire. He had been for some time involved in a legal conflict with his closest relatives and with his mother, who sought to deprive him of his caste and to strip him of his inheritance. But now he was relieved from such anxieties. His mother had so far overcome her priestly bigotry and pride as to become in some measure reconciled to her son. A year before her death, as she was setting forth on her last pilgrimage to the shrine of Jaganatha at Puri, she said to him, "Son, you

* "Last Days of Ram Mohan Roy," p. 19.

are right. But I am a weak woman, and am grown too old to give up these observances which are a comfort to me."* Further, he felt that with the erection of a new building for the Brahma Sabha in 1830, and with the increase of its numbers, he was free to leave it for a time. But there were other reasons, much weightier than the gratification of his personal inclinations, that ultimately impelled him no longer to delay the execution of his purpose. He went to England because duty and the cause of India called him. A determined effort was being made by the party of reaction to prevent the final ratification by the British Government of the law abolishing *sati*. Feeling that nothing must be allowed to imperil a reform so urgent, Ram Mohan Roy resolved to be present in person to support it. The question of the renewal of the East India Company's charter, which was to come before Parliament, seemed to him likewise to call for his presence that he might do what he could in behalf of his country. The ex-Emperor of Delhi also commissioned him as his ambassador, giving him the honorary title of Raja, by which he is generally known, that he might represent to the King certain grievances for which he wished to obtain redress.

Accordingly Raja Ram Mohan Roy sailed for England in 1830, "the first Indian of rank and influence," as has been said, "who had ventured to break through the inveterate prejudices of centuries by crossing the 'black water'." Everywhere he went in England he was received with honour and respect. He was presented to the King, and had a place assigned to him at the Coronation among the Ambassadors. While his time and energy were chiefly occupied in representing the needs of his country to the several Parliamentary committees that were at that time engaged in considering the condition

* Max Müller's "Chips from a German Workshop," Vol. II, p. 33.

of India, he also had opportunities of intercourse with some of the most distinguished Englishmen of the day, who received him as an equal. Such was William Roscoe, who described himself as his "assured friend and fellow Christian;" William Bentham, who said of him, "He has cast off three hundred and thirty millions of gods and has learned from us to embrace reason in the all-important field of religion;" John Foster, to whom he declared his belief in the resurrection of Christ as "the great fact on which he rested his own hopes of a resurrection;" and Henry Brougham. Especially at Bristol, in the house of Miss Castle at Stapleton Grove, he found himself among true friends and kindred spirits. It was while he was there seeking rest that he was attacked by fever and died on the twenty-seventh of September, 1833. Ere his death he had the satisfaction of knowing that the great work of his life was accomplished and the crime of *sati* would no longer stain the fair fame of India. He died as he lived, a Brahman with his sacred thread still about him, and was buried with no religious rites under the elm-trees in the garden of Miss Castle's house. Ten years later his remains were conveyed to the cemetery of Arno's Vale, Bristol, where a monument was erected over them by Dwarkanath Tagore, his spiritual successor in Bengal. The inscription on the tomb is as follows:—

BENEATH THIS STONE

REST THE REMAINS OF RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY BAHADOOR,

A CONSCIENTIOUS AND STEADFAST BELIEVER IN THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD;

HE CONSECRATED HIS LIFE WITH ENTIRE DEVOTION TO THE WORSHIP OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT ALONE.

TO GREAT NATURAL TALENTS HE UNITED A THOROUGH MASTERY OF MANY LANGUAGES, AND EARLY DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF AS ONE OF THE GREATEST SCHOLARS OF HIS DAY.

HIS UNWEARIED LABOURS TO PROMOTE THE SOCIAL, MORAL, AND PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, HIS EARNEST ENDEAVOURS TO SUPPRESS IDOLATRY AND THE RITE OF SUTTEE, AND HIS CONSTANT ZEALOUS ADVOCACY OF WHATEVER TENDED TO ADVANCE THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE WELFARE OF MAN, LIVE IN THE GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HIS COUNTRYMEN.

THIS TABLET RECORDS THE SORROW AND PRIDE WITH WHICH HIS MEMORY IS CHERISHED BY HIS DESCENDANTS.

HE WAS BORN IN RÂDHÂNÂGORE IN BENGAL, IN 1774, AND DIED AT BRISTOL, SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1833.

It is said that his grave is seldom visited by Indians, though so many have followed in his steps and visited the land where he, one of India's most remarkable sons, lies buried. Yet whether he be remembered and honoured, as he deserves so well to be, or whether he be forgotten, that cannot change the fact of the debt that India owes to him, her Columbus in the discovery of a new continent of truth. In estimating the greatness of Ram Mohan Roy we must remember that he and such as he are not men who have been made reformers by a realization of the intellectual shortcomings of the creed that they denounce, nor even in the first place by the spectacle of the moral corruption that results from religious decadence. They are men in whom has awakened a sense of their own personal need of a great Personal Helper and who summon men back to Him. The religious reformer is he who gives articulate expression to this instinct of man's spirit, and in no

country, and least of all in a land of religious aspiration such as India is, have such witnesses been lacking. Rāmānuja, Chaitanya, Kabir and Nanak, such names as these "pierce the night like stars," bearing witness to the inextinguishable longing that even in the midst of unbelief and superstition lifts the heart of man to God. Ram Mohan Roy was no simple peasant like Tukaram or Kabir; he was much more than the mere emotionalist that Chaitanya seems, as far as the outlines of his personality can be discerned, to have been. But the place that we accord him as a religious leader and reformer depends in no measure on his learning, his culture, his philosophical acumen. His influence did not reach to multitudes, nor did he touch the imagination or move the heart of the plain man as other messengers had done before him. His name is not familiar on the lips of unlettered thousands of this land as is the name of Tulsi Das or of Kabir. And yet he rightly has a place beside them as a spiritual teacher; and at the same time he has a place far above them as one whose spiritual longings led him into a wider atmosphere and made him drink at deeper fountains of truth than they had dreamed of. He is a great religious messenger because of his intense religious conviction of the unity and spirituality of God, a conviction that he owed to no human teaching and yet so deep and strong that, rather than surrender it, he went forth, when only sixteen years of age, from his father's house, a homeless and a friendless wanderer. But he is great as a reformer, in a sense in which none that went before him is great, because he fed his spiritual aspiration from a source that was open to none of them. For he first among Indian reformers betook himself to Christ's teaching for inspiration and for counsel and thereby set himself apart from all who had gone before him, reaching forth beyond these horizons of India that had limited the view of his predecessors and marking a new epoch in the religious history of his land.

There is a pathos in the thought of this deep lover of his own people dying in an alien land and among those of another kin, in the thought that another country keeps his bones. Yet there is a fitness in it. Still from his grave he calls his countrymen to lift their gaze beyond the horizons of their own land within which they have bounded themselves so long. He bids them rid themselves in the quest for truth of all foolish and narrow-minded prejudice, reminding them that

> "Not by eastern windows only,
> When daylight comes, comes in the light,
> In front the sun climbs slow—how slowly!—
> But westward, look! the sky is bright." *

It is this that sums up the debt that India owes to Ram Mohan Roy,—that he first broke the bonds that had straitened her for centuries; he first showed her the way of freedom and walked himself before her in that way. The day is coming when India will say of him as was said in regard to America of Emerson,—"He cut the cable and gave us a chance at the dangers and the glories of blue water."

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* Quoted in a similar connexion by Lord Curzon in his address as Chancellor to the Calcutta students.

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